

Well

By Alias In Town

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Dedication

This memoir is dedicated to my family and friends who took the time to stage an intervention. Their love for me and my love for them is immense. These people saved my life. You were a team and your names are many. I love you all and I am equally grateful.

To my son who orchestrated the intervention. You literally saved my life. Your expedient mediation, regardless of some of the obstacles you faced, was noble and loving.

To my husband, thank you for being the man that you are. Your love, support and care carry me through each day. There are many days I couldn't function without your support. Here's to another 35 years.

To my daughter-in-law for taking time from being a busy mom to help with editing, and for being a great go-to person to have open and vulnerable conversations.

To my sister and her family who took in my children and all the sacrifices that were made.

To my friends who still receive phone calls from me at all hours to provide support and accountability.

To all six of my children who each had your own journey with me through a horrible time period in our family history. Your patience, love, support, forgiveness and encouragement is stamped in my heart forever.

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Foreword

Julie Shomo, RN and dearest friend

Well is a testament to the courage of a strong woman who has allowed God to be her Shepherd “even though she walked through the valley of the shadow of death.” Words that describe Alias In Town, Creativity. Compassion, Giftedness, Courage, Determination, and Acceptance.

I wonder sometimes if God chuckles at our ideas of what we think He should do through us or others; He says. “For I know the plans I have for you...plans to give you hope and a future.” God sees Alias In Towns’ amazing giftedness and creativity and is using it in ways that neither she nor I would have imagined 30 years ago when we met.

Since I’ve known the author, I’ve observed how she is one of those people who captivates you immediately. Her huge grin and ability to make you feel like the most interesting person in the world, have always been true.

Some of my favorite moments were on the stage in rehearsal with the worship team. We were either laughter or had tears streaming down our faces, as we sang harmonies together.

She has this amazing vision for meaningful ways to make worship more impacting. That is just one example of her creativity. I learned never to be surprised by her creativity in all areas of life. We might be invited to a beach party in her home in the middle of winter, complete with filled kiddie pools and a sandy beach area.

When the illness came, the vertigo was brutal, but we all assumed it was temporary, as statistics showed it probably would be. As the months of illness became years, the hope became fragile and the light dimmed in Alias In Town’s eyes.

The feelings of watching a friend go through something so terrible made me feel alternately sad, and angry. How can God want someone ,who has such potential for good and impact, be stripped of her gifted abilities. I ached with frustration at not being able to help, fix, or make anything better.

The easy path for her would be to continue to escape through the alcohol and medications. They eased the suffering, even as they created pain for those around her. My precious friend chose to take the challenging path. She was determined to love her family and trust God her physicians and counselors. They helped her find a way to cope with the suffering.

This story is one of hope. Even in our darkness, when our suffering doesn't make sense, we are not alone. When we feel that the world would be a better place without us, the story is bigger than we can see. Alias In Town is living this story and allowing us to share the journey. Be encouraged by the hope.

Preface

Join me on the journey I took from the brokenness, disparity and pain of chronic illness, addiction, and mental illness to being Well. I tell my story through essays, reflections, poetry, personal journal entries, and original artwork.

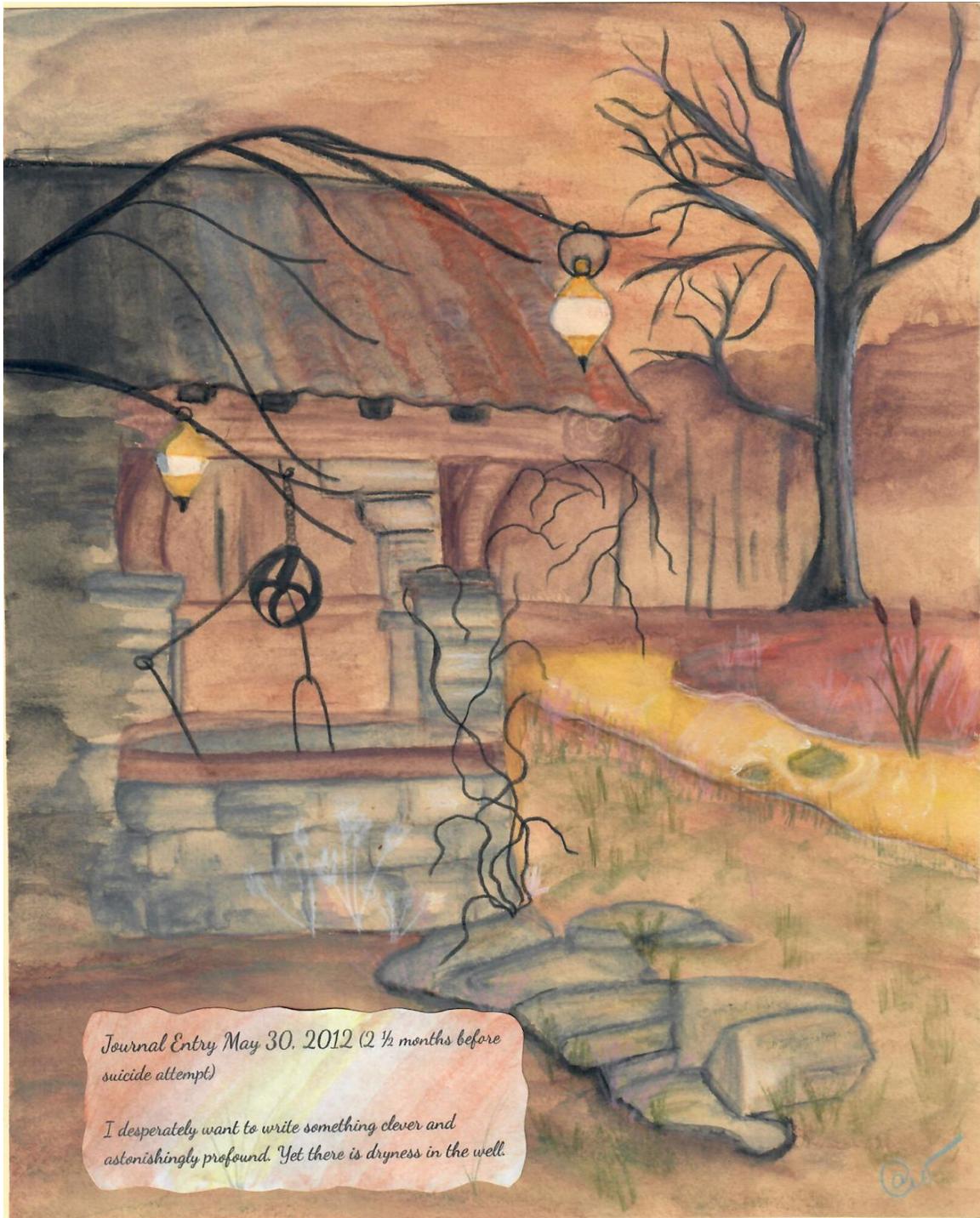
I have a chronic illness. That's just a fact in my life. Is it ironic that I titled this memoir "*Well*"? I'll let you be the judge.

It isn't ironic to me. I have discovered even in the midst of physical illness, what makes you well is not your physical state. All of us are in some sort of physical decay as we pass from this life to the next. What makes me well is the part of me no disease can touch. My soul is in the gentle, protective hands of my creator and no physical condition can touch or change that. He is my anchor. He is my rock. He is my well of water springing up into abundant life.

What I won't do in this memoir is share gory details about my particular disease. Alcohol abuse, drug abuse and a suicide attempt became an unwelcome part of my story right in the midst of learning to cope with a chronic illness and depression. My journey to, through and out of this part of my story is what this memoir is about. I am ill, but yet I am well.

Those living with chronic illness and pain share many commonalities. We create a community that can come together in care, support and understanding. My hope is this memoir will help this community.

Looking Up From The Bottom²



The bonds of sleep slowly slid off my body, and I could finally stretch out my legs. I yawned and rubbed my eyes. My morning breath was awful. The strong smell of alcohol hit my nostrils, and the heat of anger flooded my body. I was alive! Damnit! I was still alive! WHY!!! My 12 page suicide note was still attached to the bedroom door with the big bandaid mocking my lack of tape. The empty Klonopin bottle was still on the nightstand. It had been full less than 12 hours ago. A ½ liter of 100 proof liquor sat on the floor. The other half I had used to wash the pills down. I should be dead.

DAMN! I kept saying in my head. I don't usually swear, but I figured I already tried to kill myself, so *to hell with it.*

That was my state of mind. Actually, my mind didn't have a state. It was mush brain. A cohesive thought could not have stuck in my brain with super glue and duct tape. I pickled my brain in a bath of 100 proof alcohol which I secretly drank daily for about two years. In my desperation for relief, I'd followed the advice of an internet stranger who recommended alcohol to take away the vertigo. Yes. One shot did. But soon one shot wasn't enough. I needed two, then more and more. The escape was glorious. Soon, instead of just using it for vertigo, I was using all the time just to escape my illness, my reality, my depression, and the struggle I was having for identity, feelings of failure, and utter loneliness.

It wasn't just the alcohol, either. I had figured out ways of getting my hands on prescription pain pills. They also took away the vertigo, but even better, they numbed everything. I had been hospitalized with an accidental overdose just a year prior to the suicide attempt. Oh, I was such a mess! That is exactly where really bad coping strategies can land you, given enough time and energy. Limited solutions, taken to their extreme, took me to a hopeless destination -- The End. The end of myself.

Downing those pills to end my life had seemed like the perfectly logical thing to do. My clouded brain told me I had no reason to exist. Awakening from that fog was the last thing I wanted, and I was filled to the brim with anger that I was still alive. I was

still here. I was still sick. I was still useless. I was still a burden. I was still without hope. I was still lost. I was still helpless. Still...

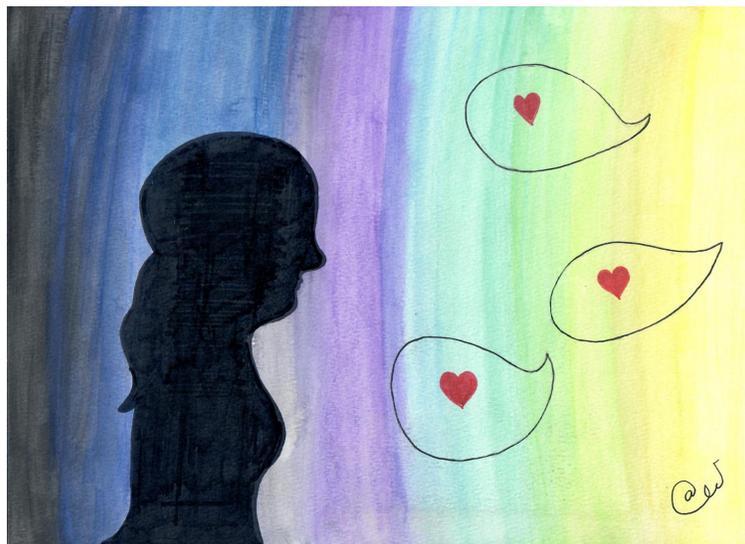
I remember a friend coming into the bedroom and hugging me, saying something like, "I heard you were having a hard time." She was there to take my children away, and I wanted to discuss my DIY headboard! Say what? Oh, my mind was just not functioning with cohesive thoughts.

When I stumbled out of the bedroom, I walked into a living room surrounded by family and friends. I actually felt like I walked into a warm wall of love. Overcome by shame, I wanted to turn around and hide. The shame! I was so ashamed, but they were inviting and understanding. It was an intervention. There was so much love in the room. Looking back, I didn't understand everything being said to me. My mind was not clear enough, but I understood the love I felt in the room. Love is a language even a drug and alcohol soaked brain could understand.

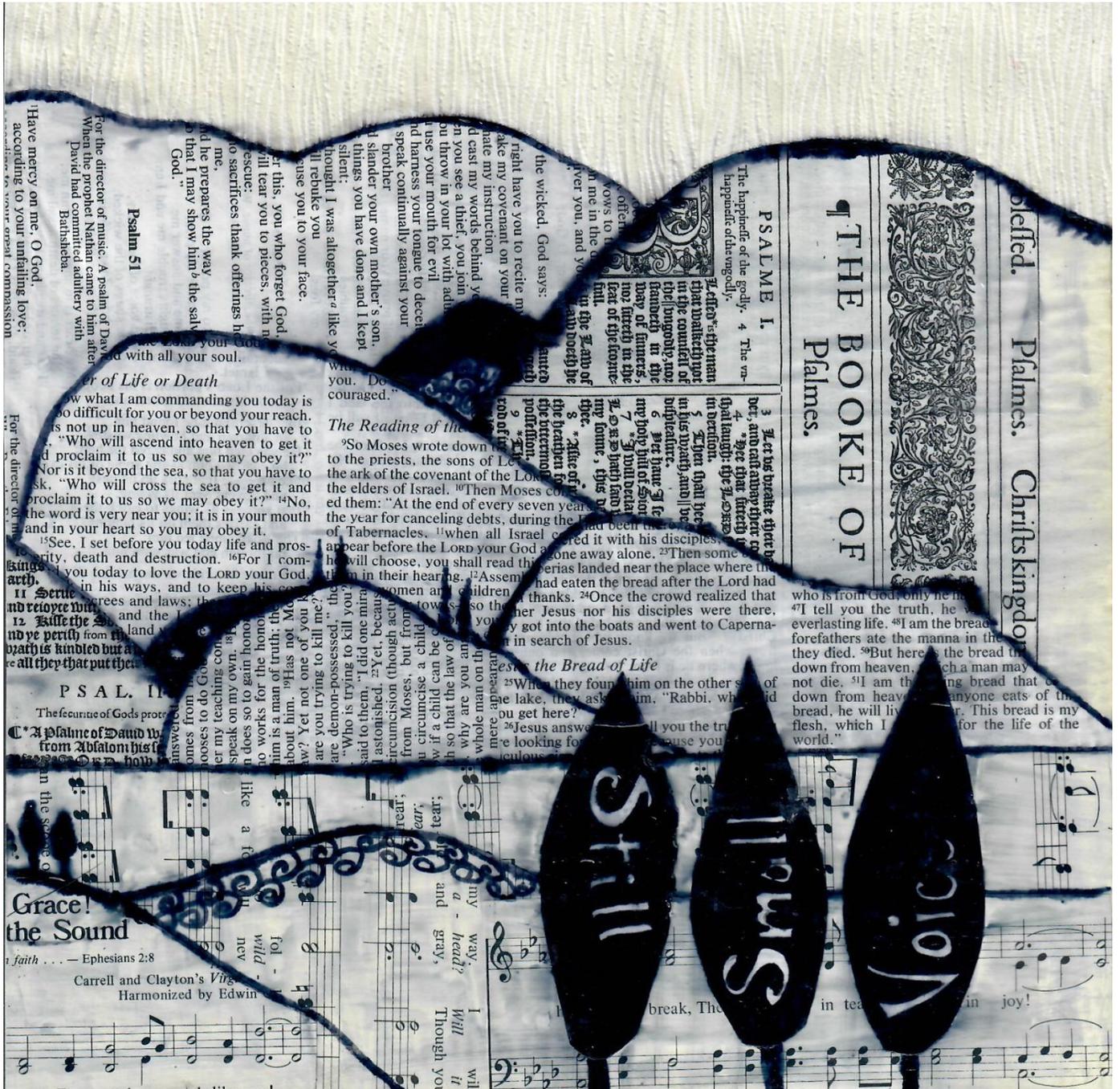
Aimee Mullins said, "All you need is one person to show you the epiphany of your own power."

I had a room of people who gave me that epiphany. They gave me a glimpse of a future. They became my future. They became my reason. I would go to the hospital for them. I would fight for my life for them. I would love them back by learning to love myself. Love is a language, and I would learn to speak it fluently.

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A Still Small Voice⁴



⁴ Still Small Voice

Hearing The Voice

Checking into a psychiatric hospital is not like checking into a hotel, that's for certain. They make sure you have absolutely nothing on your person that can be dangerous. You are not allowed to have any clothing with strings or belts. You are not allowed to bring in any personal items from home for fear they could be tainted with drugs. All personal care items are provided by them. There are no mirrors for fear the glass would be broken and used for personal harm. It is a sterile, scary, lonely, quiet, and eerie environment.

It is definitely designed as a place to recover and reset. I had a problem. My brain wouldn't think. It was too fogged up. I could not hold on to a rational thought. Each time I tried to think of something, it slipped off into this murky mess of confusion, but something miraculous happening at the same time...what I consider to be a miracle. I was hearing a still small voice.

Yes, I know! I was in a psychiatric hospital and hearing a voice in my head! I didn't let my psychiatrist know this! It wasn't an audible voice. It was a presence. It was a recognizable presence. It was a presence I had come to know as God. He never left me. These were the only thoughts on which I had clarity. Every other thought was dull and vapid, but thoughts from that still small voice were crystal clear.

*"Precious Memories how they linger
How they ever flood my soul
In the Stillness of the midnight
Precious sacred scenes unfold."*

Especially at midnight, when it was quiet and dark, music and scripture flowed through my mind. Old hymns and old songs reminded me I have value. I was loved, and not just by my family and friends, but by the one who created me.

*"She's got her father's eyes, her father's eyes
Eyes full of compassion, feeling every pain
Knowing what she's going through and feeling it the same
Just like her father's eyes, her father's eyes"*

At night, I went into the bathroom. It was the only place of solitude and quiet in the hospital. I turned on the light and shut the door, so I would not disturb my roommate. I got out my journal and sat on the floor in front of the toilet. I wrote down the words of the song or the words of scripture as they came to my mind. Sometimes, I didn't write at all. I closed my eyes, sat on the cold bathroom floor and relished in the only clear, concise thoughts streaming to me from the still small voice. This ritual became my comfort every night. I didn't have references for the sources of the scriptures, but the words were there.

The following are excerpts from my hospital journal:

I know the plans I have for you says the Lord. Plans to prosper you and not to harm you. Plans to give you a future.

Be of good cheer. I have overcome the world.

Fix your eyes on Jesus the author and finisher of your faith.

He who began a good work in you is faithful to complete it.

Be strong and courageous.

Today, I set before you blessings and curses, life and death. Now choose life that you may love the Lord your God, walk in his ways, and obey his commands. So that you may have life. For the Lord is your life.

Blessed Assurance Jesus is mine, oh what a foretaste of glory divine.

Heir of salvation, purchased with love

Born of his spirit washed in his blood.

I even found myself writing in my journal Sunday school songs from my childhood. The simplest of words seem to have the deepest meaning.

Yes, Jesus loves me . Yes, Jesus loves me. Yes, Jesus loves me. The Bible tells me so.

I am so glad that Jesus loves me. Jesus loves me . I am so glad that Jesus loves me. Jesus loves even me.

I will never forget this experience. One of the most meaningful moments with my God was on the bathroom floor of a psychiatric hospital. God truly never leaves you or forsakes you. God's word is living and active and cuts even to the marrow of the bone to infuse you with new life. I still hear his still small voice when I quiet myself to listen.

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Practically Listening

Long before my trip to the psychiatric hospital, a method of devotional journaling was taught to me by a dear pastor. I'll call it the "Still Small Voice Method." This method requires the use of colored pens. I use three different colors. The first color represents my voice. The second color represents scripture, and the third color represents the voice of God.

The following journal excerpt was written in October of 2004. It recaptured my heart on my way to recovery.

Journal Entry - October 4, 2004

God, you are so faithful! Praise you for your loving kindness to me....

I confess...

I have some needs on my heart...

Colossians 1:

v12 thanks to the Father who has qualified you

v16 all things were created by him and for him

v20 to reconcile to himself all things...

v23 if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel

...